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ABSTRACT

The study reported in this paper expands the arena of agenda-setting to include the content of a small daily newspaper and what the people of that community say they read and talk about during a non-political period. The newspaper's agenda was established by content analysis of 51 issues, resulting in classification of 3415 stories in 41 content categories. One hundred fifty respondents were asked what they remembered reading in "yesterday's" newspaper, as well as what they had been talking about with family, friends, and acquaintances for "the past few days." Topics of conversation were obtained for local, regional, state, national, and international events. Findings suggest that at the local level the content of the newspaper is an important and independent contributor to the content of community discussion. Other sources of information appear to make substantial contributions at the regional, state, national, and international levels. (Author/KS)

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COMMUNITY DISCUSSION AND NEWSPAPER CONTENT

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Abstract

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION AND NEWSPAPER CONTENT: EXTENDING THE AGENDA-SETTING CONCEPT

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Agenda-setting research has focused primarily upon political campaigns and the findings leave little doubt as to the correspondence between media and public attention to the primary topics of the election contests. The study reported here attempts to expand the arena of agenda-setting to include the broad spectrum of content in a small daily newspaper and what the people of that newspaper's community say they read and talk about in their daily lives during a non-political period.

The newspaper's agenda was established by content analysis of 51 issues of the paper published during May, June, and July, 1975; 3,415 stories were classified in terms of 41 standard content categories. Since the entire story was the classification unit, multiple categorization was used to provide a best representation of the 41 categories. One hundred fifty residents of the community were selected for interviewing using a two-stage probability sampling procedure. Respondents were asked what they remembered reading in "yesterday's" newspaper. They were also asked what they had been talking about with family, friends, and acquaintances during "the past few days." Topics of conversation were obtained for local, regional, state, national, and international events. Up to four responses were recorded for the reading response and eachof the five levels of conversation.

The bulk of the newspaper's content, 42.1 per cent of the stories, was national wire service material while 25.9 per cent was local news. The top five content categories were Acts of Government, Sports, Entertainment, Crime, and Individual Achievement.

When all respondents are considered as an aggregate, all zero-order correlations between the content of the newspaper and reported discussion across the 41 content categories are significant for all five levels of conversation. The correlation between what respondents reported reading and the content of the newspaper is significant at the local and regional levels. When the effect of reading is held constant, the correlation between what the respondents said they talked about at the local level and the content of the newspaper vanishes. The partial correlations between what was discussed and what was in the newspaper remain significant at the other four levels--regional, state, national, international--when the effect of reading is held constant.

These findings suggest that at the local level the content of the newspaper is an important and independent contributor to the content of community discussion. Other sources of information appear to make substantial contributions to topics of community conversation at the regional, state, national, and international levels.

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION AND NEWSPAPER CONTENT: EXTENDING THE AGENDA-SETTING CONCEPT

Long before Cohen[1] wrote his oft-quoted phrase on the press' presumed ability to influence the content of public discussion, Robert Park[2] wrote that the newspaper had taken over the job of the town gossip providing topics for public discussion. More recently, Atkin[3] has provided data showing the media supply conversational content for people anticipating communication in a variety of social situations. Yet despite extensive study of interpersonal communication by rural sociologists, communication research long ignored the fact that members of the mass media audiences talk to each other.[4] Rogers and Shoemaker[5] have reviewed an extensive literature on the interpersonal flow of information and influence, yet the bulk of the work on interpersonal communication among mass communication researchers focuses on studies of diffusion of specific news events.[6]

The extent to which the newspaper can substitute for the town gossip is, of course, limited by the norms of the industry and the laws of privacy and libel, but there is no reason to believe that any item in the newspaper is exempt from becoming a topic of the community's conversational agenda. People do talk about what is in the newspaper. Edelstein and Larsen[7] demonstrated the relationship between frequency of reading a newspaper item and reported conversation about that item. They reported the process as a one-way communication channel from reading to talking, and greater attention to the newspaper was associated with greater attributed conversation.

Agenda-setting research has dealt primarily with two of the three models outlined by Becker, McCombs, and McLeod[8]--the intrapersonal and interpersonal salience models. Little testing of the community salience model has yet appeared in the literature.[9]

The theoretical rationale for agenda-setting postulates a direct effect of the media in creating the public agenda. In terms of specific issues such as the political campaign, on which agenda-setting studies have concentrated to date, there is little reason to doubt the direct effects assumption, although the supporting data are correlational. Sanders, Atwood and Dybvig[10] found that in the context of a congressional campaign, the correlation between content of news stories about the candidates and the content of the candidates' press releases was in excess of 0.80, and the correlation between what people said was in the newspaper and the content of the candidates' press releases was 0.70. Further, the correlation between what people said was in the newspaper and what they said they talked about was 0.69. Since the press release must precede the news story (the release was printed verbatim in many instances), and the news story must precede what people obtained (or thought they obtained) from the newspaper, the direct effect postulation of agenda-setting appears well grounded in this context. This sequential effects process, then, may be extended to show an effect on what voters say they talk about since the talk content correlates significantly with (1) newspaper stories, (2) perceived content of the newspapers, and (3) content of the candidate's press releases.

Although the agenda-setting hypothesis was originally formulated only in the context of political information, the concept focuses directly on the age-old question of "what do the media do to the people?" Agenda-setting appears to be a variation of the largely discounted "hypodermic needle" philosophy. While agenda-setting does not postulate the relationship between media content and overt behavior, such as is continually addressed in the television-and-violence argument agenda-setting does specify a direct effect on the mass media audience. As such, the concept provides a frame of reference for examining media effects in a broader spectrum of communication than just political campaigns.

Since the agenda-setting hypothesis must be tested in non-political contexts if it is to be generalized, it seems necessary to a better understanding of the place of the newspaper in the community to examine on a general level (1) what a newspaper publishes, (2) what people in the community say they read in the newspaper, and (3) what these people say they have been talking about with friends and associates. In this study we focus on the extent to which the same topics appear in the newspaper and on the reading and conversational agenda. The content is examined within the context of five different story proximities generally appearing in the newspaper: international, national, state, regional, and local news.

The bulk of the agenda-setting research has concentrated on analysis of aggregate data, and McCombs[11] and Weaver[12] have indicated a need for a psychological interpretation of agenda-setting focusing on the individual's need for orientation. However, except on specific issues, say the political campaign or the assassination of a well-known person, the individual psychological analysis might be impossible to demonstrate under typical field conditions. In the normal day-to-day operation of the media and public attention to media content, individual "effects" might well be masked by sheer numbers of events and attention levels may be too small to be isolated. In the community as a whole the pervasive effects of agenda-setting will most likely be demonstrable in terms of the aggregate.

Gormley[13] illustrated one of the problems of agenda-setting by showing no correlation between media agenda and the agenda of an elite audience where there is a large number of specific issues. However, the more general concern of the "limited effects" model of media effects might focus on the nature of a continuing public agenda and media agenda. If over time and outside of the political arena there is a continuing significant correlation between the public agenda and the media agenda we will be in a better position to assess the

strength and importance of what Klapper[14] has called low level learning from the media. The agenda-setting effect should not be considered in an all-or-nothing frame of reference, but over time there should be shifts in agenda of public discussion as the media agenda shifts. Such shifts would illustrate a pervasive impact of the mass media on the "public mind."

Theoretically, agenda-setting should occur in those instances where the public has the least opportunity, or no opportunity, to experience personally the individuals and events reported. The media can serve to extend the horizons of the reader,[15] and through the surveillance function[16] the public obtains information about otherwise obscure events. To the extent that the public talks about people and events not in the everyday field of personal experience, the information must come from the media. McCombs and Schulte[17] summarized the situation as follows.

> If the media tell us nothing about a topic or event, then in most cases it simply will not exist on our personal agenda or in our life space. To a considerable degree, especially in the realm of public affairs, only items communicated by the media can appear on personal agenda. In this simple 0/1 situation there necessarily is a significant linkage between media and personal agenda, especially for items outside the immediate environment. (p. 17)

As such, we would expect the agenda-setting function of the media (but not necessarily of any single medium) to be most pronounced in reference to distant objects and events. For non-local news, the local newspaper would be just one potential media source of information supplementing or complementing the interpersonal communication channel. At the local level there are greater chances for personal exposure to people and events in the news. And, at the local level, we would also expect people to talk about more mundane topics, such as the routine activities of family and friends, which would be unlikely to reach the pages of the community newspaper. These conversations would serve to dilute the strength of any observed association between newspaper content and the content of community discussion. To the extent that local

topics reported by the newspaper are also experienced first hand and/or discussed with others one meets during the daily routine, the newspaper would be less likely to be the "agenda-setter" for the community. Further, persons who have considerable interpersonal conversation during the day would seem, we think, to be less likely to be affected by the newspaper's agenda-setting potential than would the person who has little informal conversation and who thus derives most of his information from the newspaper. We are working from the assumption that the newspaper is only one of a great many elements in the individual's daily routine and probably not a very important one at that. Consequently we do not expect to find a strong relationship between what is published as "important" in the view of the newsman, and what is "important" to the people in the community. That is to say we do not expect to find correlations between what people read about and what they talk about except in the aggregate.

In relation to the media established agenda, Funkhouser[18] has demonstrated an interesting problem. During the 1960's the public's agenda corresponded closely to media agenda, which did not closely correspond to agenda derived from official records of events. To the extent that the media agenda are not good representations of events, the public is not likely to consider the issues in terms of any priority other than media established priority. Nearly 55 years ago Lippman[19] wrote that the news is only as good as the records from which it is taken. To the extent that the media do not accurately abstract the records of the day, the surveillance function of the media may be dysfunctional.

Another complexity in the agenda-setting arena is the question of what the public reads as well as the extent to which the media report various kinds of news. The newspaper may devote substantial space to a topic, but if the material is not read, the probability of the topic becoming a topic on the

conversational agenda would seem to be reduced. Conversely, a topic receiving little media attention may be widely discussed in the community. The question then arises as to the mediating influence of reading, in the case of the newspaper, on the press-community discussion agenda relationships. If a significant relationship between press agenda and community discussion agenda remains intact when the effects of reading are held constant we would view this relationship as reflecting the importance of other sources of information in the community discussion agenda. If a zero order relationship between press agenda and community discussion agenda vanishes when the effect of reading is removed we would view this as strong evidence of the importance of the press as a source of community information.

Another question we explore in this report is the extent to which generalized content categories used for traditional content analysis can be effectively utilized in agenda-setting research. The literature shows that agenda-setting can be quite readily found using a small number of broad categories, but that a large number of specific categories probably leads to non-significant relationships between extent of media coverage and respondent assessment of topic importance. In addition to using more traditional content categories, we also content analyzed the entire newspaper rather than just the front page, jump page, and editorial page as seems to be customary.

In summary, this report examines the relationships between what people in a community say they talk about at the local, regional, state, national, and international levels, what they say they read in the local newspaper, and the extent to which the newspaper prints stories about those topics. In view of the foregoing, it is hypothesized that:

1. In the aggregate there will be a significant positive correlation between the newspaper's agenda and the community reading agenda.

2. In the aggregate there will be a significant correlation between the newspaper agenda and the community conversation agenda.

3. Holding reading constant, there will be no significant partial correlation between newspaper agenda and the community conversation agenda at the local level.

4. At the individual level there will be no significant correlation between what people say they have read in the newspaper and what they say they have been talking about.

By focusing on the local level in No. 3 above, we hope to avoid or at least reduce the impact of other media on the community agenda. While there may still be an influence of radio, there are no local television stations, and those stations received in the community only rarely pay attention to items of interest to individual communities.

METHOD

Data were gathered during mid-July 1975 from 150 residents of a small southern Illinois city (population about 8,000). The sample was a two-stage probability sample designed to provide a representation of the community, not just known subscribers to the local daily newspaper. At the first level, blocks within the city limits were chosen at random, and within each block two dwelling units were selected. Interviewers were instructed to interview females and males at a ratio of about 8 to 7, respectively. Respondents under 35 years of age were over sampled since only 15 percent of the population was in the 20-34 age group. Each respondent who subscribed to the paper was asked what he/she remembered reading in the paper during the preceding day. Up to four responses were recorded. All respondents were asked what they had been talking about with friends and family. Five such discussion questions were asked focusing on (1) local events, (2) regional, or Southern Illinois, events, (3) state events, (4) national events, and (5) international events. Again, up to four responses were recorded for each question.

Each issue of the local daily newspaper for a two-month period preceding the final day of interviewing was content analyzed. A set of 41 content categories was used to code 3,415 non-advertising items in 51 issues of the paper. The categories, ranging from accidents and art to war and weather, were adaptations of categories previously used in published studies.[20] The same 41 categories were used to classify the respondents' responses to the single reading and five discussion questions.

The importance of content to the newspaper's agenda was defined as frequency of publication of stories whose content fit specified categories. The category with the most stories was most important on the newspaper's agenda (Rank 1) and the category with the fewest stories was least important (Rank 41). Multiple classifications were used when called for by the content of the story.[21]

The importance of the content category for the reading and the community discussion agenda were determined in essentially the same way. The open-ended responses were classified by content category, and the categories were ranked based on the number of responses per category. The respondents' answers were summed across the four potential responses for the reading and for each of the five discussion levels (local, regional, state, national, and international). These frequencies were then summed across all individuals to provide a ranking of the categories that could be correlated with the newspaper's agenda. This procedure provides seven variables for analysis--newspaper agenda, reading agenda, and the five conversational agenda--local news, regional news, state news, national news, and international news.

The aggregate data analysis outlined above provides one measure of the agenda-setting impact of the press. A second measure was derived by examining the correlations between the reading and discussion categories across the 129 respondents who bought a daily newspaper. If reading the newspaper exerts a

major impact on the topics of community discussion, significant correlations should be found between what the respondents reported reading and what they reported talking about.

Zero-order and partial correlations were computed between newspaper agenda, the reading agenda, and the community discussion agenda in the aggregate data analysis. The correlations were examined for (1) all respondents, (2) men, (3) women, (4) respondents under 35 years of age, and (5) respondents 35 years of age and older.

RESULTS

There were 86 females (57.3 per cent) and 64 males (42.7 per cent) in the sample. These proportions are quite close to the 1970 census figures which reported 54 per cent female and 46 per cent male. Fifty-five (36.7 per cent) of the respondents were under 35 years of age, more than twice the proportion in the census figures. There were 117 subscribers to the local daily, 78 per cent of the respondents.

Newspaper Content

Fifty-one issues of the newspaper published during May, June, and July, 1975, were analyzed and the content coded into 41 categories. There were 4,483 news stories and advertisements coded of which 3,415 were stories. Since the classification procedure permitted coding a story into more than one category (e.g., a story about financing local schools could be classified as both taxes, category 16, and education, category 17) the total number of classifications recorded was 4,648, a total of 1,233 secondary listings.

In terms of proximity to the community, the bulk of the 3,415 stories (1,438) were national, 42.1 per cent of the total. There were 887 local stories (25.9 per cent), 475 regional stories (13.9 per cent), 335 state stories (9.8

per cent), and 210 international items (6.1 per cent). In addition, there were 70 stories (2.2 per cent) that could not be classified in terms of proximity.

When the stories were classified by producer, a plurality were wire stories from United Press International--1,470 stories or 43.0 per cent. This is as we would expect considering the preponderance of national news stories noted above. The second largest grouping was produced by the local staff, 1,278 stories or 37.4 per cent of the total. Syndicated material accounted for 522 stories (15 3 per cent), 20 stories were initiated by readers (0.6 per cent), and 21 stories (0.6 per cent) were reprinted from other publications. The source could not be established for 104 of the 3,415 items. The majority of the news items were "hard news" (2,173, 63.6 per cent). There were 860 features (25.2 per cent), 234 editorials (6.9 per cent), and 141 photos (4.1 per cent). Seven items (0.2 per cent) defied classification.

In terms of frequency of appearance (including multiple classifications), the top five classifications across the five levels of proximity were (1) Government, 472 stories or 10.2 per cent; (2) Sports, 420 stories, 9 per cent; (3) Entertainment, 383 stories, 8.2 per cent; (4) Crime, 354 stories, 7.6 per cent; and (5) Individual Achievement, 286 stories, 6.2 per cent. None of the 41 categories ranked in the top five on frequency of appearance on all five levels of proximity. At three of the five levels some categories contained no stories. At the local level there were no items about Agriculture, Non-criminal drugs, and Science. At the state level there were no stories about Arts and Culture, New Mines, Science, and Sex. At the International level there were no stories about Arts and Culture, Community Construction, Community Improvements, Non-Criminal Drugs, Mine Labor, Taxes, Environment, and New Mines.

Aggregate Agenda Relationships

When all respondents are considered as a group, all zero-order correlations

between the content of the newspaper and reported discussion across the 41 content categories are significant for all five levels of proximity--local, regional, state, national, international. In addition, the correlation between what the respondents said they read about and the content of the newspaper is significant at the local and regional levels while the correlations between reported reading and community discussion are not significant at the state, national, and international levels. (Table 1)

When the effect of reading is held constant, the correlation between what the respondents said they talked about at the local level and the content of the newspaper is non-significant. The partial correlations between what was discussed and what was in the newspaper remain statistically significant at the other four levels when the effect of reading is held constant.[22] These findings suggest that at the local level, for all respondents, the content of the newspaper is an important and independent contributor to the content of community discussion. At the same time the significant partial correlations between discussion and content of the newspaper at the regional, state, national, and international levels suggests the contribution of other information sources, most likely television and radio, to what people in the community talk about. Overall, the data support hypotheses 2 and 3 but provide only partial support for Hypothesis 1.

Women and Men

For both men and women the zero-order correlations between content of the newspaper and the topics of community discussion are significant at all five levels of proximity. Differences do appear between men and women in both the correlations between discussion categories and reading at the five proximity levels, and there are differences in terms of the effect of reading on the relationships between newspaper content and community discussion.

For women, only the correlation between reading regional news and talking about regional events is significant. This suggests that the newspaper's priorities for content publication are not related to the women's priorities for news at the local, state, national and international levels. When the effects of reading are held constant, the partial correlations between women's community discussion and newspaper content remain significant for local and state levels while the correlations between women's community discussion and newspaper content vanish for the regional, national, and international levels. It appears that whatever talking women do about regional, national, and international events, the newspaper exerts an important and independent influence on the content of those discussions. Conversely, for local and state levels the influence of newspaper content on the content of conversation is weak, and other sources of information make substantial contributions to the information pool women draw upon in their discussions with others in the community.

For men the correlations between national and international topics read and newspaper content are significant while correlations between reading and newspaper content for local, regional, and state topics are non-significant. When the effects of reading are held constant for men, the partial correlations between newspaper content and discussion of topics at the regional, state and national levels remain statistically significant while the correlations between newspaper content and talking about local and international topics vanish. Thus, the newspaper appears to be a primary source of information at these two levels.

As was the case for all respondents combined, the significant partial correlations, holding effects of reading constant, suggest a strong influence of other sources of information on the content of community discussion. For national and international topics, the influence of television news undoubtedly must be considered while at the regional level and the state level it is possible that substantial amounts of information are obtained from the local radio stations. Trotter and Huey[23] found a relatively high dependence on television

news among people living in rural southern Illinois, and our study site was one of the communities included in their analysis.

Age Groups

Substantial differences also appear in the findings for respondents who are under 35 years of age and those 35 years of age and older, and neither age group appears as oriented toward the newspaper as do the two sex groups. These differences point to a segment of the population, those under 35 years, who the newspaper is apparently not fulfilling a substantial information function. While there are somewhat stronger relationships between older respondents and newspaper use than between younger respondents and newspaper use, there still appear to be important voids in the information function served by the newspaper.

For the younger respondents only the zero-order correlation between what they talk about at the national level and the content of the newspaper is significant. The correlations between what they said they talked about and what they read about at the regional and national levels were significant for the under 35 age group. When the effect of reading is held constant, the single significant relationship between national topics discussed and the content of the newspaper vanishes. Since the correlation between talking and reading at the national level and between talking and content of the paper for national issues were significant, it seems that at the national level the newspaper is a major and independent source of information. However, there is little indication that the newspaper is an important information source for news at the local, regional, state, and international levels.

For the older respondents, the zero-order correlations between newspaper content and the community discussion was significant for local, regional, and national levels. The zero-order correlations between what the older respondents said they talked about and what they said they read about were significant at all five levels of proximity. When the effect of reading is held constant, all

significant relationships between community discussion and newspaper content vanish. This suggests quite strongly that the information the older respondents use in their day-to-day conversations with friends and associates is heavily dependent upon what they read in the community's daily newspaper.

Individual Effects Correlations

As we noted above, McCombs and Weaver have pointed to the necessity for investigating the psychological processes involved in agenda-setting before a thorough understanding of the media's influence can be described. While the present data provide no information about psychological processes, they do permit a preliminary check on relationships between what the individual reads and what he talks about. To test these reading-talking relationships for the 41 categories across the 129 newspaper readers phi coefficients were computed for each of the content categories.

Only three of the 41 comparisons were statistically significant. One of the categories was a local classification, one national, and the third and weakest association crossed all five levels of analysis. At the local level there was a moderate correlation between reading and talking about mining ($r = 0.41$, $p < .01$). We will examine this relationship in greater detail in a later section of this paper. At the national level, the correlation between reading and talking about National Defense was 0.51 ($p < .01$). Cutting across the five levels of proximity was Business Economics ($r = 0.27$, $p < .05$). These outcomes suggest that tracing media effects on individuals across broad categories is going to be difficult, but these three significant outcomes tend to disconfirm the earlier prediction that agenda-setting probably wi'l not be found at the individual level in the context of a community discussion model. Hypothesis 4 must be rejected. If significant correlations can be consistently demonstrated with greater than chance frequency concerning subject matter the individual is unlikely to have personal knowledge about, the agenda-setting

hypothesis will gain substantial support. In the present instance, three significant correlations were found; two would be expected by chance. This is hardly overwhelming support for agenda-setting, but it is better than anticipated.

The Problem of Content Categories

The use of broad content categories raises the question as to whether the material in any category that people are reading about is the same material as what they are talking about. For example, in the case of the Politics classification, the broad category might well include such diverse subject matter as election law reform, travel schedules of the candidates, changes in the polling places in the community, and a name-calling incident between two of the candidates. Assume for the moment that the first three items were printed in the newspaper but the name-calling incident was omitted. In this example the voters could be reading about the election law reform, travel schedules, and changes in the polling places. At the same time they could be talking about the name-calling incident. In this situation there would be a correlation between what the voters were reading and talking about in terms of the category, but the correlation would be spurious in terms of the subject matter involved. The correlation would be a function of the breadth of the category and not of correspondence between what people were reading and talking about.

To provide some information about this apparent problem, one of the categories, mining, was examined in detail. The site of the study is a coal mining community. The town has ridden the cyclical mining industry to the depths of depression and the heights of economic boom. In March, 1975, plans had been announced to sink two new coal mines near the community. Respondents were asked during the interviews what changes they expected in the community due to the new mines, and these changes were compared with community changes the local newspaper indicated the residents could expect.

The agenda-setting hypothesis suggests that audiences not only learn about issues through the media, but they also learn the degree of importance to be placed on these issues. In this community the overall importance of mining as a community issue was clearly established; nearly 87 per cent of the respondents reported that the industry provides the "bread and butter" for the community's tables. However, to test the agenda-setting hypothesis, it was necessary to probe within the general mining content category and search for relationships between the newspaper and the respondents on specific issues. If agenda-setting is tenable in the specific category, there should be a significant correlation between what the newspaper says about the new mines and what the respondents say. That is, it would be expected that the newspaper set the saliency for particular aspects of the new mines issue, and respondents would be expected to mention the same information which has been presented in the newspaper.

Respondents were asked if they anticipated changes in the community due to activity of the mining industry. If the respondents answered 'yes' to that question, they were asked what changes they expected. Up to four answers were recorded. All stories about the new mines were analyzed for changes they indicated the community could expect. Fifteen content categories for the anticipated changes were developed.[24] More than three-fourths of the respondents (118 or 78.7 per cent) said they expected changes in the community. Twenty-seven (18 per cent) said they did not expect changes, and five (3.3 per cent) said they did not know whether or not there would be changes. In all, the 118 persons gave 247 responses. The most frequently mentioned change expected was Population with 59 responses. Common examples of responses in this category were "more people," and "town will grow." The Employment category was second with 53 mentions, common examples being "more jobs," "more work," and "less unemployment." The third largest number of responses were comments about the General Economy of the community.

The correlation between the changes in the community that the newspaper's stories indicated could be expected and the readers' anticipations of community changes was 0.80. Whether the newspaper was setting the community expectations or reflecting them is, of course, open to question. However, there seems to be little question but that the newspaper and its readers share similar expectations regarding community changes as they relate to the coal industry. For each of the 247 responses readers gave in answer to anticipated changes, the respondents were asked if they regarded the changes as "good" or "bad." Only 15 responses were perceived as negative. The newspaper's content also was nearly all positive in terms of anticipated change, a finding also noted in other studies.[25]

In view of the high correlation between the expected changes reported by the newspaper and those reported by the readers it appears that the general content classification is a viable method of categorizing media content and community discussion topics for agenda-setting research.

DISCUSSION

On balance, the findings indicate:

1. Broad content categories appear to be useful for further exploration of the community discussion model of agenda-setting.

2. Within the broad content categories, the relationships between newspaper content and community discussion appear to substantiate the usefulness of the broad category system.

3. The aggregate data correlations indicate that the newspaper's agenda has a significant impact on what people in the community read about and what they talk about.

4. The correlations across individuals are not particularly convincing in terms of relationships between what people read about and what they are talking about. A major limitation of this level of analysis is that direct

comparisons with newspaper content cannot be made.

Considering all respondents, the data support the agenda-setting function of the community newspaper at the local level. The newspaper appears to have a significant impact on what people talk about. At the non-local levels, the newspaper does not appear to have a major impact on conversation topics for the community as a whole. Other media, particularly television, provide substantial amounts of information about regional and state news through locally produced news programs and about national and international news on the network programs.

There is no difference between men and women in the proportions who listen to radio for specific information, but of those who do listen for specific reasons, significantly more women (85 per cent) than men (63.4 per cent) use radio for local information (Table 2). In addition, significantly more women (94.2 per cent) than men (79.1 per cent) report watching television news daily (Table 3). There is no difference between the sex groups in their preference for television networks or stations. About 50 per cent of both groups reported watching the CBS station, 27 per cent the NBC station, 8 per cent the ABC station, and the remainder reported no preference among stations.

There is no significant difference between younger and older respondents in terms of (1) listening to radio for specific information, (2) interest in local information on radio, and (3) viewing television news. There is a significant difference between younger and older respondents in terms of preference for networks/stations. Significantly more older respondents reported viewing the CBS station. (Table 4)

Respondents expressed interest in content of both the newspaper and the radio clearly indicating a focus of attention on local news, and women are significantly more concerned with local events than are men. Further, it appears that men's knowledge of local events is closely tied to the information published in the newspaper. Women, on the other hand, appear to attend to a

wider variety of information sources, and across the five levels of community conversation they report a significantly greater frequency of conversation than do men. Younger respondents also report significantly more conversations than do older respondents.[26]

The respondents who are under 35 years of age appear to have a reading agenda that is set by the newspaper's agenda, judging from the magnitude of the correlation ($r = .66$) between what the respondents said they read and the newspaper's content. Respondents over 35 years of age appear to be substantially more selective in the material they read in the newspaper in view of the non-significant correlation ($r = .24$) between what they said they read and the content of the newspaper. This selectivity appears to be closely related to the topics the over-35 respondents discuss with friends and associates since the correlations between reading and talking variables are significant at all five levels of proximity. For the younger respondents only the correlations between reading and topics discussed at the regional and national levels were significant.

There is no significant difference between men and women nor between younger and older readers in terms of reasons for buying a daily newspaper. However, a significantly larger proportion of older respondents than younger respondents purchased the daily newspaper. (Table 5)

The correlations indicate that the press appears to be at least partially setting the public discussion agenda, but it is clearly not the only source of information for topics of conversation. While the correlations between the reading and talking variables and the newspaper's content are statistically significant in a substantial number of comparisons, the correlations must be considered modest at best. In no case was more than 32 per cent of the variance accounted for, and in only five of 20 outcomes can we interpret the findings as agenda-setting.

Up to this point we have presented the outcomes "as if" we were confident of a causal relationship, and, indeed, we are confident causal links exist. However, we cannot ignore the possibility that the correlations we have observed are spurious—the function of some third variable. Obviously, the order of events cannot be clearly be specified as a one-way flow from newspaper reading to community conversation on the bases of correlational data from a single point in time. Longitudinal analysis, preferably an intervention in the newspaper agenda under field experimental conditions, is necessary for clarification of the relationships. While a direct effect of reading on community conversation seems a likely outcome, it is also possible there is a reciprocal effect in which talking about certain subjects increases readership of news stories about those subjects.

FOOTNOTES

1. Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.

2. Robert Park, The City. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925.

3. As with all generalizations, exceptions exist to the point we are trying to make. Among the classic studies investigating the relationships between interpersonal and mass communication are: Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Personal Influence. New York: The Free Press, 1955; Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet. The People's Choice. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944; Bernard Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William McPhee. Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954. Katz has reviewed the long-standing differences in sociological and communication research approaches to interpersonal communication. See Elihu Katz, "Communication Research and the Image of Society: Convergence of Two Traditions," American Journal of Sociology, 65 (March 1960) 435-440.

4. Everett M. Rogers and F. Floyd Shoemaker, The Communication of Innovation: A Cross Cultural Approach. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1971.

5. See for example Paul J. Deutschmann and Wayne A. Danielson, "Diffusion of Knowledge of the Major News Story," Journalism Quarterly, 37 (Summer 1960) 345-355; Bradley S. Greenberg, "Person to Person Communication in the Diffusion of News Events," Journalism Quarterly, 41 (Autumn 1964) 489-494; G. Ray Funkhouser and Maxwell McCombs, "The Rise and Fall of News Diffusion," Public Opinion Quarterly, 35 (Spring 1971) 107-113. A field experiment in interpersonal diffusion of information is reported by S. C. Dodd, "Testing Message Diffusion in Controlled Experiments Charting the Distance and Time Factors in the Interaction Hypothesis," American Sociological Review, 18 (1953) 410-416.

6. Alex Edelstein and Otto N. Larsen, "The Weekly Press' Contribution to a Sense of Urban Community," Journalism Quarterly, 37 (Autumn 1960) 489-498.

7. Lee B. Becker, Maxwell E. McCombs, and Jack M. McLeod, "The Development of Political Cognitions," in Political Communication: Issues and Strategies for Research, ed.: Steven H. Chaffee, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975, pp. 21-63.

8. Marc Benton and P. Jean Frazier, "The Agenda Setting Function of the Mass Media at Three Levels of Information Holding," a paper presented at the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, August 1975.

9. Keith R. Sanders, L. Erwin Atwood, and Eugene H. Dybvig, "Communication in the General Election Campaign: 'All I know Is What I Read in the Papers,'" (in progress).

10. Charles K. Atkin, "Anticipated Communication and Mass Media Information Seeking," Public Opinion Quarterly, 36 (Summer 1972) 188-199.

11. Maxwell E. McCombs, "Agenda-Setting: A New Perspective of Mass Communication," a paper presented at Mohawk Valley Community College, Utica, N.Y., April 1975.

12. David H. Weaver, "Psychological Explanations for Agenda-Setting," a paper presented at the conference on the Media and Agenda-Setting Function, Syracuse University, 1974.

13. See for example William T. Gormley, Jr., "Newspaper Agenda and Political Elites," Journalism Quarterly, 52 (Summer 1975) 304-308; Leonard Tipton, Roger D. Haney, and John Baseheart, "Media Agenda Setting in City and State Election Campaigns," Journalism Quarterly, 52 (Spring 1975) 15-22.

14. Joseph T. Klapper, The Effects of Mass Communication. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1960.

15. Bruce H. Westley and Malcolm S. MacLean, Jr., "A Conceptual Model for Communication Research," Journalism Quarterly, 34 (Winter 1957) 31-38.

16. Charles R. Wright, Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective. New York: Random House, 1959; Harold D. Lasswell, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," in L. Bryson (ed.) The Communication of Ideas. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948, pp. 35-51.

17. Maxwell E. McCombs and Henry Schulte, "Expanding the Domain of the Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media," mimeo paper, undated, S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communication, Syracuse University.

18. G. Ray Funkhouser, "The Issues of the Sixties: An Explanatory Study in the Dynamics of Public Opinion," Public Opinion Quarterly, 37 (Spring 1973) 62-75.

19. Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion. New York: Macmillan, 1922.

20. Many of the definitions are based on two references, either per se or in modified form: Chilton R. Bush, "A System of Categories for General News Content," Journalism Quarterly, 37 (Spring 1960) 206-210; David H. Weaver, L. E. Mullins, and Maxwell E. McCombs, "Competing Daily Newspapers: A Comparison of Content and Format," American Newspaper Publishers Association News Research Bulletin 8 (December 31, 1974) 19-21. Complete titles for the 41 categories and category descriptions are available from the authors. Shortened category titles are: 1. Accidents; 2. Agriculture; 3. Art; 4. Community Construction; 5. Community Improvements; 6. Non-drug Crime; 7. Drug Crime; 8. Defense; 9. Non-criminal drugs; 10. General Economics; 11. Cost of Living; 12. Business; 13. Government Economics; 14. Non-mine Labor; 15. Mine Labor; 16. Taxes; 17. Education; 18. Energy; 19. Entertainment; 20. Environment; 21. Acts of Government; 22. Health; 23. Holidays; 24. Individual Achievement; 25. Milestones; 26. New Mining; 27. Mining; 28. Miscellaneous; 29. Oddities; 30. Politics; 31. Race Relations; 32. Religion; 33. Science; 34. Sex; 35. Secondary Social Groups; 36. Primary Social Groups; 37. Space; 38. Sports; 39. Transportation; 40. War; 41. Weather. The authors would like to thank the following for their assistance in the content analysis of the paper. Dr. Ronald E. Ostman, Georgette Pang, Marianne Murdock, Dennis Hale, and Steve Dienna.

21. Since the basic unit of analysis was the complete story, multiple classification was considered more appropriate than classification by mutually exclusive categories. The multiple classification procedure more accurately reflects the frequency of each category's appearance in the newspaper when the basic unit is large in that it permits secondary emphasis in a story to be counted rather than ignored. If the coding units were small, such as the paragraph or sentence, a mutually exclusive procedure would be appropriate.

22. Categories about which respondents neither read nor talked at the five levels of proximity were: Local--Agriculture, Arts, Government Economics, Energy, Race Relations, Science, Sex, and Transportation; Regional--Non-criminal Drugs, Government Economics, Environment, Race Relations, Religion, Science, and Sex; State--Agriculture, Arts, Community Construction, Government Economics, Energy, Environment, Holiday, Science, and Sex; National--Non-criminal Drugs, Environment, Holiday, Religion, Science, Sex, and Transportation; International--Arts, Non-criminal Drugs, Education, Holiday, Race Relations, Science, and Sex.

23. Edgar P. Trotter and Rodney A. Huey, "Media Use and Believability Among Urban, Small Town, and Rural Audiences," a paper presented at the annual conference of the International Communication Association, Chicago, April 1975.

24. Complete titles for the 15 categories and category descriptions are available from the authors. Shortened category titles are: 1. Mine Safety and Mine Dangers; 2. Population; 3. Employment; 4. Money; 5. General Economy; 6. Coal Mines; 7. Business and Industry; 8. Uses of Coal; 9. Coal Technology; 10. Housing; 11. Importance of Coal; 12. Community Facilities; 13. Miscellaneous Good; 14. Miscellaneous Bad; 15. Miscellaneous Neutral.

25. Other studies have also found the tendency of the local newspaper to accentuate the positive in reporting local news. One study of a community in the same area as the current study said of the local newspaper "Much of the news was obviously biased to picture the community as being better than it was to remove responsibility from local citizens for community difficulties." And a study of an upstate New York community found: "The newspaper always emphasizes the positive side of life." See Herman P. Lantz, People of Coal Town. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958; Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, Small Town in Mass Society. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 292. Janowitz suggests that the community press is a kind of institution that serves as an effective instrument of social cohesion within the community. See Morris Janowitz, The Community Press in an Urban Setting. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952.

26. Women and respondents under 35 years of age reported significantly more conversations than did men and respondents 35 years of age and older. The mean number of responses for the subgroups for the five levels were:

	Women	Men	Under 35	35 and Older
Local	1.66	1.06	1.51	1.35
Regional	0.84	0.70	0.84	0.77
State	0.66	0.63	0.69	0.62
National	1.21	1.14	1.29	1.12
International	0.86	0.64	0.89	0.69
	p = .031		p = .031	

TABLE 1
Correlations Between Reading, Newspaper Content and Five Categories of Community Discussion.

	Newspaper Content		Reading
	r	partial	r
All Respondents (N=150)			
Local	.33*	.18	.41**
Regional	.44**	.28*	.52**
State	.53**	.50**	-.03
National	.37**	.37**	.10
International	.31*	.31*	.08
Reading	.43**		
Under 35 Years			
Local	.13	-.03	.24
Regional	.17	-.00	.27*
State	.21	.11	.20
National	.28*	.09	.32*
International	.23	.11	.22
Reading	.66**		
Over 35 Years			
Local	.29*	.20	.51**
Regional	.30*	.20	.64**
State	.19	-.02	.84**
National	.32*	.23	.51**
International	.24	.09	.75**
Reading	.24		
Women (N= 86)			
Local	.29*	.27*	.11
Regional	.32*	.24	.28*
State	.56*	.56*	.09
National	.27*	.21	.20
International	.26*	.21	.19
Reading	.37**		
Men (N= 64)			
Local	.30*	.23	.20
Regional	.43**	.37**	.22
State	.49**	.51**	.12
National	.27*	.27*	.35*
International	.27*	.14	.27*
Reading	.58**		

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

TABLE 2
Proportions of Men and Women Listening to Radio For Local and Non-Local Content

		Local	Non-Local	Total
Men	n	26	15	41
	r%	63.41	36.58	100.0
	c%	33.76	63.50	41.41
Women	n	51	9	60
	r%	85.00	15.00	100.0
	c%	66.23	37.50	58.59
Total	n	77	24	101
	r%	76.23	23.76	100.0
	c%	100.0	100.0	100.0

Chi square = 6.25, df=1, $p < .05$

TABLE 3
Proportions of Men and Women Who Do and Do Not Watch Television News

		Do	Do Not	Total
Men	n	51	13	64
	r%	79.69	20.31	100.0
	c%	38.64	72.22	42.67
Women	n	81	5	86
	r%	94.19	5.81	100.0
	c%	61.36	27.78	57.33
Total	n	132	18	150
	r%	88.00	22.00	100.0
	c%	100.0	100.0	100.0

Chi square = 7.30, df=1, $p < .05$

TABLE 4
Proportions of Older and Younger Respondents Reporting Network/station Preferences for Television News Viewing

		CBS	NBC	ABC	Any	Total
35 and Older	n	53	22	5	7	87
	r%	60.92	25.29	5.75	8.05	100.0
	c%	79.10	61.11	45.45	38.89	65.91
Under 35	n	14	14	6	11	45
	r%	31.11	31.11	13.33	24.44	100.0
	c%	20.90	38.89	54.55	61.11	34.09
Total	n	67	36	11	18	132
	r%	50.75	27.27	8.33	13.64	100.0
	c%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Chi square = 13.76, df=3, $p < .01$

TABLE 5
Number and Proportion of Respondents in Each Age Group Buying and Not Buying the Daily Paper

		Buying	Not Buying	Total
Under 35	n	34	21	55
	r%	61.82	38.18	100.0
	c%	29.06	63.64	36.67
35 and Older	n	83	12	95
	r%	87.37	12.63	100.0
	c%	70.94	36.36	63.33
Total	n	117	33	150
	r%	78.0	22.0	100.0
	c%	100.0	100.0	100.0

Chi square = 10.34, df=1, $p < .01$